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## The American Institute of Sacred Literature

### A PROFESSIONAL READING COURSE ON JESUS IN THE LIGHT OF MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

*What can be known about Jesus, and what are we to think of him? This question is of vital interest to the world of religious thought, especially in recent times when so much attention has been given to its investigation. In these pages for four successive months, SHIRLEY JACKSON CASE, of the New Testament Department in The University of Chicago, will outline a course of reading on this topic and discuss some of the best and most recent contributions of scholars to it. Questions for consideration should be addressed to the Editors of the BIBLICAL WORLD; inquiries concerning books and traveling libraries, to the American Institute of Sacred Literature.*

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#### PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

The Professional Reading Courses of the American Institute of Sacred Literature have been prepared in the hope that pastors and students of religious subjects might find hereby suggested the best books on themes of vital interest in their profession. In the course here proposed we are undertaking to introduce our readers to what is probably one of the most important problems of religious thinking today.

No one can read our religious journals without being aware that the methods of critical scholarship which have brought about so many significant changes of opinion in the field of Old Testament study are now being applied to the New Testament. The results of this method of investigating the New Testament are of supreme interest to all Christians, especially in so far as these results are related to our thought of Jesus. In the history of Christian faith, the New Testament accounts of his person and work have usually been accepted without question. Will it be necessary for modern scholars to abandon this traditional custom? Or will it be established more firmly than ever by the results of critical study?

Evidently there is only one way in which the thoughtful reader can arrive at a satisfactory answer to these questions. Mere dogmatic affirmations or denials of the necessity of changing our views have no weight with thinking men. They will desire to examine the data, and

to form their answer in accordance with their estimate of the evidence. The present course is intended to guide the reader into some of the investigations of our day which contribute toward a scholarly understanding of the problems raised by modern critical inquiry as to the life and teaching of Jesus, and his significance for religion.

The course as outlined falls into four main divisions:

I. Our sources of information in the light of critical study.

II. The life and teaching of the historical Jesus as determined by modern critical scholarship.

III. The New Testament interpretation of Jesus formulated by the disciples after his death.

IV. The modern critical estimate of Jesus' significance for religion.

Formerly one merely asked, What do the gospels say about Jesus? An uncritical compilation of the statements of all four gospels constituted the source materials for a "Life of Jesus." But nowadays we are being told that the gospels are not all of equal value historically. In fact, it is said that not all portions of any single gospel are of the same historical worth. What gospels, or what portions of what gospels, are, then, reliable sources of information about Jesus? What answer would the modern critical scholar give us to this question?

Students now distinguish rather sharply between Jesus as a historical individual, and the Christ of primitive Christian faith. The former pertains to the activity of Jesus as a historical personality, while the latter relates to believers' thought of him subsequent to his earthly career. Recent scholarship has been much concerned with the question of what this earthly Jesus did and said. What are the results of this inquiry?

The early believers' interpretation of Jesus has also become a subject of critical investigation. We are all aware that the New Testament writings did not take form until two or more decades after Jesus' death, but in the meantime Christianity was being preached by different persons and in various parts of the oriental world. It is natural, therefore, to ask to what extent the New Testament picture of Jesus' significance has been influenced by these circumstances. And in how far is Jesus authority for this primitive preaching about him? Here again we shall interrogate modern scholarship.

Finally we shall acquaint ourselves with some typical opinions of recent writers as to the significance of Jesus for religion today. There are at present some wide differences of opinion on this question, and to many, no doubt, it seems to be the most vital of all problems connected with

our study of Jesus. What are the determining factors which the scholar of today must take into account in formulating his conclusions on this important issue?

A few significant books on each of these four topics are selected for special reading and study. A summary of the content of each book, with some critical estimate of its more important features, will be published from time to time. These will be accompanied by some suggestive questions, and a supplementary bibliography for those who wish to extend their reading over a wider field. Readers are encouraged to send to the editor of the course such queries as seem to them important for the understanding of the problems, and for which they find no satisfactory answer in the books studied. In so far as possible these questions will be the subject of further consideration either in these columns or in private communications. It will be our constant aim to give the reader every possible assistance in the understanding of the problems involved, and in the attainment of the data available for their solution.

The ultimate solution of our difficulties must of course be an individual affair. But whatever the final decision on individual problems may be, of one thing we feel confident: it is impossible to devote oneself to a careful study of the problems suggested by this course without coming to feel that, notwithstanding the wide differences of opinion which prevail in the theological interpretation of Jesus, modern scholarship does give us a very real sense of genuine acquaintance with Jesus himself. Christian faith and devotion cannot fail to be strengthened by the systematic attempt to spend the serious hours of a year's leisure in the effort to understand better the Master whose disciples include men today who may differ widely in theological opinions.

The books chosen for study are:<sup>1</sup>

F. C. Burkitt, *The Gospel History and Its Transmission*.

E. F. Scott, *The Fourth Gospel: Its Theology and Purpose*.

P. W. Schmiedel, *Jesus in Modern Criticism*.

W. Bousset, *Jesus*.

W. Sanday, *Life of Christ in Recent Research*.

J. Weiss, *Paul and Jesus*.

J. Weiss, *Christ: The Beginnings of Dogma*.

P. Lobstein, *The Virgin Birth of Christ*.

K. Lake, *The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*.

<sup>1</sup> All of these books may be purchased from the University of Chicago Press, or they may be loaned from the Institute's traveling library. Inquiries should be directed to the secretary of the Institute, The University of Chicago, Chicago, Ill.

- J. Denney, *Jesus and the Gospel: Christianity Justified in the Mind of Christ*.  
 J. Warschauer, *Jesus: Seven Questions*.  
 W. Sanday, *Christologies Ancient and Modern*.

Burkitt's book shows how the gospels arose, the purpose each was intended to serve, and their respective historical value. Scott dwells upon similar phases of the Fourth Gospel, showing more especially how the author aimed to meet the needs of his generation by stating in terms of its thinking the sufficiency of Christ for the salvation of men. Bousset and Sanday sum up, from slightly different points of view, what they believe to be the results of critical scholarship in its historical estimate of the actual career of Jesus and the fundamental features of his teaching. Passing from these more distinctly historical phases of the study we turn to the problem of interpretation. Paul was a great interpreter of Jesus, and so distinctive is Paul's work that it is sometimes questioned whether he was not a new founder of Christianity. Weiss answers this question by showing the fundamental unity between Paul and Jesus. Weiss's second book briefly but clearly surveys the early stages of christological speculation. The Virgin Birth and the Resurrection of Jesus are two doctrines of so unique importance to early Christianity that they seem to call for special treatment. This is done by Lobstein and Lake, each adhering to the so-called historical method of investigation. The last three volumes bring us to the question of modern interpretation. Denney represents a scholarly yet conservative point of view, Warschauer takes a more liberal position, and Sanday with his characteristic insight surveys the main features of the problem as it has presented itself in the history of Christian thought, with special reference to its present solution.

#### I. THE SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The books selected for careful reading in this first division of the course are: F. C. Burkitt, *The Gospel History and Its Transmission*, and E. F. Scott, *The Fourth Gospel: Its Theology and Purpose*.

Professor Burkitt subjects the gospel records to a candid criticism which yields valuable and interesting results. His comparison of the Gospel of Mark with the Gospels of Matthew and Luke shows it to have been used by the authors of these gospels and known and used in substantially the same form and with the same contents which it now exhibits. For the gospel history then, Mark becomes our principal source. If we seek now to examine the Gospel of Mark with a view to determining its general trustworthiness, it proves to accord thoroughly with the data

supplied by other ancient records of the same period. Historical method thus leads us to the conclusion that in Mark we are nearer to the actual scenes of Jesus' life than in any other gospel record. Even Matthew and Luke are to a larger extent interpretations, and to a less extent unbiased records of fact, than is Mark. This we must constantly remember in dealing with these three sources. We must resist the temptation to fit into the historical framework supplied by Mark all the tales and sayings of Christ, which we find in the other gospels.

Again, Burkitt's comparison of the *Antiquities* of Josephus, written about 94 A.D., with the Gospel of Luke shows remarkable coincidences, which have led him, with other scholars, to conclude that Luke in writing his gospel and the Acts made use of Josephus' work. The evidence for this is not, however, quite conclusive. We must recognize that if Luke did use the *Antiquities* he steadily misused them, for practically every notable coincidence is attended by a notable departure. But most scholars will agree with Burkitt that the "we-sections" of the travel narratives of Acts show such resemblances to the body of the Acts, that it is difficult to resist the impression that the diarist of Acts 16:10 ff., 20:5 ff., 21:1 ff., 27:1 ff., was the author of Acts and the Third Gospel, that is, was Paul's friend, Luke, the physician. Since our four gospels are anonymous works it is great good fortune that we are able to identify the writers of the two earlier ones with so high a degree of historical probability.

If we seek to combine these conclusions as to the Third Gospel, we must suppose that it was written near the close of the first century, by one who shared in the experiences recorded in the later chapters of the Acts, but did not witness the ministry of Jesus, nor the earlier works of his followers. For those matters, particularly for the former, he must have been dependent upon such materials as he might in his travels, inquiries, and studies obtain. One such source we have already identified in the Gospel of Mark. Another was a document from which the writer of the First Gospel drew not a little of his discourse material.

The writer of the Gospel of Matthew, like the evangelist Luke, thus employed as materials for his composition the Gospel of Mark, and another source rich in the teachings of Jesus, which some have sought to identify with the Logia written by the apostle Matthew and mentioned by Papias. But these and other materials are used in very different ways by the two later evangelists. Matthew takes over into his gospel nearly everything in Mark, but freely transposes and rewrites, and interweaves with Mark a wealth of discourse material, sometimes interrupt-

ing the orderly course of Mark's events with an extended discourse, or a striking incident from another source. Luke shows a greater dependence upon the Greek Bible than does Matthew, and does not scruple to omit considerable parts of Mark, yet in his use of the Second Gospel Luke is much more faithful to Mark's order of events than is Matthew. Once, indeed, he interrupts Mark's narrative with a "great interpolation," as it has been called (Luke 9:51—18:14), the very section of Luke which shows most considerable resemblances to Matthew. But in Matthew these utterances are scattered and recombined with other material sometimes drawn from Mark, while in Luke they show no such evidences of transfer and recombination. These facts suggest that the so-called "Great Interpolation" in Luke may really represent one of his written sources which he incorporated into his gospel as little disturbed as possible, somewhat as he incorporated Mark.

Professor Burkitt points out that the best attested sayings of Jesus are not those which appear in all three Synoptists, but those which may be traced to the two older sources, Mark, and the other lying back of our longer Synoptists. What in Jesus' teaching most impressed his hearers may thus fairly be sought in this doubly attested material.

In the Gospel of John, on the other hand, Burkitt finds not so much a history as a theology. It was an interpretation, not a biography of Jesus, and won its way to general acceptance because it so well expressed the general conviction of the churches as to the worth and meaning of Jesus.

At least as early as 110 A.D. the four gospels existed in written form, and the three longer ones, at least, were in circulation in different regions. By 150 certainly, the four had come to be used together, and by 170 they had together distanced all competitors, and fully established themselves in the esteem of the churches.

It would be difficult to name a book in which the origin and worth of the gospels have been more cordially and sympathetically sketched. The general soundness of the positions taken can scarcely be denied and the inference seems inevitable that we must no longer use the gospels, and all that is in them, side by side as of co-ordinate historical worth, but must set ourselves seriously to the task of historical criticism and evaluation, if we are to learn all that the gospel records may teach us of the ministry and nature of Jesus.

Every student of the Gospel of John, and of the questions which that gospel calls forth, will read Professor Scott's thoughtful and stimulating book with the keenest interest. It is a fresh penetrating discus-

sion of the contents of the gospel, with the object of making clear, not only the purpose of the gospel, but the actual theological situation in which that purpose was wrought out. The gospel came into existence in the third generation after Christ, and is a "work of transition in which primitive Christianity is carried over into a different world of thought." We do not know who the author was, but he was a Christian whose fellowship with the living Christ gave him an understanding of the real mind of the master. His work is not a mere speculative treatise upon the eternal worth of Jesus, but a large, full, appreciative interpretation of the facts of his earthly career in the light of a disciple's inward experience—an interpretation which shall show that the Christ of experience and the Jesus of history are one, and that in the recorded life there is an abiding import.

While the facts are thus used, it is well to bear in mind that they are of subordinate importance for the Evangelist. He comes to them with a certain conception of the person and life of Christ, and in order to make this clear, handles the data with considerable freedom. To such an extent is this true that it is questionable how far the old argument for the authenticity of the narrative—its vivid details—can be maintained. "The picturesque detail can be set down, not to the accurate memory of the eye-witness, but to the fine instinct of the literary artist." In the discourses a large subjective element is present. They are the words of Jesus plus interpretative expansions and additions made by the writer of the gospel. In all this there is no intention of falsifying: rather the abiding purpose of making evident the eternal Christ, through whom men shall gain life, dominates the whole structure of the gospel. The necessity for this fresh and larger interpretation was in the time in which the Evangelist was living, in the culture by which he was surrounded, and in the tendency to devitalize Christianity by either making it into a philosophy or treating it simply as a tradition. The earnest effort to meet this necessity has caused the incorporation of diverse elements which the writer has not successfully fused. "Again and again we meet with isolated ideas which cannot be reconciled with the characteristic Johannine thought. . . . The author is continually trying to find place within the same system for opposite types of thought and belief. . . . A revelation given through a historical life is interpreted by means of a philosophical doctrine with which it cannot in any true sense be reconciled."

From these statements and quotations the author's point of view can be readily gained. The whole book is occupied in making good these



assertions. "Three main sources are traceable in the gospel, the synoptic tradition, the writings of Paul, and the Alexandrian philosophy"; but the material from each has been stamped with the author's own genius. One is somewhat surprised after the strong emphasis upon the unfused character of the gospel to come upon an equal emphasis upon its organic unity. This latter is so clear as to make Wendt's theory of a double source wholly untenable. That the gospel has been influenced by the teachings of Paul seems unquestionable, but it is less evident that the story of Nathaniel is a symbolic reference to the great apostle. The whole section on the relation of the gospel to Paul is worth most careful attention. So too is the discriminating estimate of the bearing of Alexandrian influence. "They do not affect the substance of the Johannine thought so much as the forms under which it is presented."

Before taking up the discussion of the leading doctrines of the gospel, the author devotes two chapters to setting forth the polemical and ecclesiastical aims which he discovers in it. There are at least three parties. The Jews, the followers of John the Baptist, and the Gnostics receive attention with polemical intent, and this fact makes the gospel strongly controversial. In the interesting chapter on ecclesiastical aims the position of the author is revealed in such statements as these:

"His [the Evangelist's] conception of Christ as the Logos involves him in a view of life which can only be described as semi-physical. . . . John accepts without question the ordinary church doctrine of the mystical efficacy of baptism. . . . Baptism is the necessary miracle by which this change (regeneration), half physical in its character, is made possible."

Such interpretations may call forth sharp dissent. One of the persistently debated questions regarding the Fourth Gospel is the relation of the prologue to the rest of the gospel. Is it of the nature of a post-script, or does its doctrine of the Logos mold the whole succeeding narrative? Certainly our author is right in declaring that "the theme of the gospel is not the Logos, but the Divine person, Jesus Christ." But when he claims that the evangelist has so "imported the doctrine of the Logos into the gospel record as to empty the life of Christ of much of its real worth and grandeur," and that he is trying to interpret under the forms of philosophy what has been given him in the experience of faith, he will not command universal assent. The only philosophic term which the gospel offers us is the Logos, and that is immediately filled in with content from the Old Testament, and from the Evangelist's own experience.

In the two deeply interesting chapters on "Life" and the "Communication of Life" we are brought to see the same combination of meta-physical and religious conceptions—the same combination of Greek notions with those derived from experience—as appear in the unfolding of the doctrine of Christ.

"John involves himself in a view (of life) which may fairly be described as semi-physical. . . . The life was present in him as an ethereal essence, and is transmitted through the elements of the Eucharist which represents his flesh and blood. . . . Nowhere is John's affinity to the Greek thinkers more unmistakable than in the value he assigns to knowledge." "Union with Christ is on one side a magical transaction involving a relation to Christ which is almost physical in its nature: on the other it is grounded in a moral fellowship."

John's spiritual interpretation of the return of Christ is finely set forth, and the true bearing of the Evangelist's profound conception of the spiritual as opposed to the apocalyptic understanding of this great reality made helpfully evident. Because of his doctrine of a spiritual return of Christ, the author finds that there is no place in the Johannine theology for the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. It is difficult to distinguish between the work of the Spirit and the work of the exalted Christ. The teaching of the Evangelist regarding the Spirit is an attempt to combine the doctrine of Paul with his own regarding the exalted Christ.

Such in bare and imperfect outline is the method of this earnest and thoughtful interpretation. The gospel is highly esteemed, yet there is much in it that cannot have permanent worth. The Evangelist "has recourse to the speculative forms which the thought of his time afforded him, and seeks to express by means of them the purely religious truths of Christianity. The result is that the genuine import of his teaching is, to a great extent, obscured. We have constantly to disengage it from the alien metaphysic which appears to interpret, but most often warps and conceals it." Is this judgment wholly justifiable? Are we not in danger of overemphasizing the Evangelist's attempt at giving a metaphysical presentation of Jesus? Did he not aim rather to present the religious value of his Master as the revelation of God to men? This may at least be regarded as still an open question.

#### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Over what period does the composition of our four gospels extend?
2. What was the process of literary growth during this period?

3. To what extent can the names of personal followers of Jesus be connected with these writings?
4. What were the main purposes which the several evangelists aimed to serve by their writings?
5. Does the question of authorship materially affect the question of historical reliability?
6. How can the primitive character, and also the historical worth, of gospel tradition be tested?
7. What are the oldest elements of this tradition, and what can be said as to their historical accuracy?
8. What picture of Jesus do the oldest phases of the tradition present?
9. How did the various evangelists relate their thought of the earthly Jesus to that of the heavenly Christ?
10. Is the value of the gospels for us today conditioned solely by the amount of historical information they give us about Jesus?

#### ADDITIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

- James Moffatt, *Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament*.  
 E. D. Burton, *Principles of Literary Criticism and the Synoptic Problem*.  
 A. Harnack, *The Sayings of Jesus*.  
 F. C. Burkitt, *The Earliest Sources for the Life of Jesus*.  
 P. Wernle, *The Sources of Our Knowledge of the Life of Jesus*.  
 B. W. Bacon, *The Beginnings of Gospel Story*.  
 B. W. Bacon, *The Fourth Gospel in Research and Debate*.  
 W. Sanday, *The Criticism of the Fourth Gospel*.  
 J. Drummond, *An Inquiry into the Character and Authorship of the Fourth Gospel*.  
 P. W. Schmiedel, *The Johannine Writings*.

Moffatt's work is indispensable for the study of the literary problems of the gospels; Burton makes a very minute examination of the literary relationships of the Synoptic Gospels and reconstructs their supposed source documents; Harnack attempts to reconstruct the ancient source containing Jesus' sayings, but the method employed seems to some critics too mechanical; Burkitt's *Earliest Sources* popularizes conclusions similar to those given in his *Gospel History*; Bacon's *Beginnings* is a minute analysis of the Gospel of Mark, with a view to determining its sources and their historical worth; Wernle gives in popular form the constructive results of advanced gospel criticism in Germany. Of the works on the Fourth Gospel, Sanday's is a survey of current opinion and a conservative estimate of the problems; Drummond holds a mediating position, while Bacon and Schmiedel arrive at more radical results.